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Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 3701

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, GT
SUBJ: CHURCH VIEWS ON PANZOS

REF: A) STATE 150258 (B) GUATEMALA 3612

SUMMARY: IN INTERVIEW WITH SECRETARY OF GUATEMALAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, EMBOFF HEARD HARSH INDICTMENT OF GOVERNMENT FOR PANZOS EVENTS. SECRETARY STATED THAT THE CHURCH PLACES BLAME FOR PANZOS DIRECTLY ON GOVERNMENT IN LEAGUE WITH LANDOWNERS, BUT HE DID NOT SPECIFY WHO GOT IN THE FIRST BLOW. HE PORTRAYED THE CHURCH ASFRUSTRATED OVER LACK OF DIALOGUE WITH SUPPOSEDLY MODERATE GOVERNMENT AND PRESIDENT, AND EXPRESSED HOPE FOR BETTER RELATIONS WITH INCOMING ADMINISTRATION. DETAILED REMARKS FOLLOW BY AIRGRAM. END SUMMARY

1. EMBOFF, JUNE 20, CALLED ON MONSIGNOR MARIO MARTINEZ LEJARZA, AUXILIARY BISHOP OF THE GUATEMALAN ARCHDIOCESE AND SECRETARY OF THE GUATEMALAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE. IN HIS VIEW, THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT WAS NOT RESPONDING TO SOCIAL REFORM NEEDS. LAND
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AND HUMAN DIGNITY WERE THE PRINCIPAL HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IN GUATEMALA. IN THE CASE OF PANZOS AND ELSEWHERE, THE GOVERNMENT (PARTICULARLY THE LAND AGENCY INTA) AND LANDOWNERS, HE SAID, HAD JOINED FORCES TO DEPRIVE COMPESINOS OF THEIR RIGHTS. INSTEAD OF PROTECTING THE CAMPESINOS/INDIAN, THE GOVERNMENT WAS PARCELING OUT PUBLIC LANDS TO POLITICAL FAVORITES AND DEPRIVING CAMPESINOS OF LAND WHICH THEY HAD WORKED FOR GENERA-

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TIONS. LANDOWNERS TOOK ADVANTAGE OF INDIAN IGNORANCE AND EXISTING LAWS TO AUCQUIRE LAND WHICH CAMPESINOS BELIEVED TO BE THEIRS. LAND WAS SACRED TO THESE PEOPLE. REPEATED INJUSTICES SUFFERED BY THE GENERALLY PASSIVE INDIANS COULD ONLY BE EXPECTED TO AROUSE PASSIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE BISHOP SAID, ONE COULD NOT EASILY ACCEPT THE ARGUMENT THAT CAMPESINOS HAD ATTACKED HEAVILY ARMED SOLDIERS AND LANDOWNERS. NOR, HE SAID, COULD ONE ACCEPT THE THESIS THAT THE SOLDIERS WERE CAUGHT IN A SURPRISE ATTACK. THEY EXPECTED AND WERE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING. MONSIGNOR MARTINEZ COULD NOT SAY WHETHER THE LANDOWNERS OR MILITARY FIRED FIRST, BUT HE COULD NOT BELIEVE THE CAMPESINOS, ARMED WITH NO MORE THAN STICKS AND MACHETES, HAD INITIATED THE ATTACK. HE ALSO COMPLAINED BITTERLY ABOUT A MACHINE-GUN PLACEMENT ON A TOWN ROOF WHICH PRUPORTEDLY SPRAYED THE CAMPESINO CROWD WITH BULLETS. HE CONCLUDED THE CAMPESINOS HAD BEEN SET UP FOR SLAUGHTER. ASKED HOW MANY WERE KILLED, HE REPLIED, "HUNDREDS."

2. THE MONSIGNOR DENIED CHURCH AGITATION. HE SAID UNDOUBTEDLY THERE WERE SOME THERE WHO TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION FOR POLITICAL ENDS. BUT THEY COULD ONLY DO THIS BECAUSE OF THE ATTITUDE OF THE GOVERNMENT AND LANDOWNERS "WHICH PAS PRESSED THE CAMPESINO TO THE WALL." VATICAN II HAD DEFINED THE CHURCH'S ROLE. CHARACTERIZING ITS EVANGELIZING RESPONSIBILITIES AS COMMUNISM WAS NO MORE THAN A CONVENIENT GOVERNMENT SMOKE SCREEN.

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3. EMBOFF ASKED IF THE CASE OF LA SOLEDAD (NEAR PANZOS) WERE NOT A DISPUTE AMONG CAMPESINOS. NO, THE BISHOP REPLIED. IT WAS TRUE THAT CAMPESINOS HAD BEEN GIVEN LAND IN LA SOLEDAD, BUT THE DISPUTE AROSE BECAUSE THE LANDOWNERS WERE EDGING CAMPESINOS OFF. HE THEN RELATED THIS EFFORT OF THE LANDOWNERS TO THE FRANJA TRANSVERSAL, THE AREA OF NORTH-CENTRAL GUATEMALA BEING OPENED UP BY A NEW ROAD. LANDOWNERS WHO ARE NOT USING LAND THEY PRESENTLY HOLD ARE TRYING TO GRAB MORE IN ANTICIPATION OF RISING LAND VALUES. (SEE REF B FOR EMBASSY COMMENT ON THIS PHENOMENON AS IT RELATES TO PANZOS.)

4. THE BISHOP TOLD EMBOFF IN CONFIDENCE THAT A DIALOGUE HAD BEEN STARTED WITH PRESIDENT-ELECT LUCAS AND VICE PRESIDENT-ELECT VILLAGRAN KRAMER. THE MONSIGNOR SAID HE FELT THE LESS PRETENTIOUS LUCAS WAS LIKELY TO HEAD A MORE MORAL ADMINISTRATION THAN THAT OF LAUGERUD, WHOM HE CHARACTERIZED AS HAVING "PRETENSIONS OF HOLINESS." THEN, TOO, HE VENTURED THE HOPE THAT VILLAGRAN KRAMER'S LIBERAL OUTLOOK WOULD BE REFLECTED IN THE NEW ADMINISTRATION'S POLICIES.

5. COMMENT. THE BISHOP IS A SPANISH JESUIT WHOSE COMMENTS ARE ALL THE MORE REVEALING BECAUSE HIS PUBLIC REPUTATION IS THAT

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OF A MODERATE IN A DECIDEDLY UNRADICAL NATIONAL HIERARCHY. HIS SOMETIMES SWEEPING STATEMENTS AND POSSIBLE EXAGGERATIONS (E.G., "HUNDREDS" OF PANZOS CAMPESINOS KILLED -- WE HAVE NOT SEEN ANY CHARGES EXCEEDING 150) MAY BE FED BY BITTERNESS OVER THE "MURDER AND DISAPPEARANCE" OVER THE YEARS OF CATECHISTS (LOCAL RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTORS DRAWN FROM THE CAMPESINO LEADER-SHIP) WHICH HE ONLY MENTIONED AT THE END OF THE CONVERSATION. HE APPEARED TO HAVE NO FIRST-HAND INFORMATION -- THERE WERE NO PRIESTS OR NUNS IN PANZOS WHEN THE CLASH OCCURRED. WHILE HIS VIEW OF PANZOS (WHICH HE PRESENTED AS INDISTINCT FROM THAT OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE) MAY BE ON THE MARK, WE CANNOT HELP BUT SUSPECT THAT IT MAY BE COLORED BY A SENSE OF HIS AND THE CHURCH'S FRUSTRATION. ALTHOUGH HIS REMARKS WERE FOR THE MOST PART GENERAL ONES, HE WENT FURTHER THAN THE PUBLISHED STATE-
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MENTS (BEING POUCHED) OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE AND THE DIOCESE OF VERAPAZ IN BLAMING THE GOVERNMENT.

6. THE ARMY'S VERSION OF PANZOS EVENTS IS WELL SUMMARIZED IN DATT IR 6 838 0119 78 (19 JUN 78). WE WOULD NOTE THAT EVEN THAT ACCOUNT DWELLS ON THE INEQUITIES OF EXISTING LAND DIS-TRIBUTION PRACTICES AND THE INDIAN/CAMPESINO PREDICAMENT.
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